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ROSEBURG, OR.



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REFLECTIONS on a photo that may be Mary E. Vail 1858-1870

by Jeffrey Hunt

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This small and striking portrait measures just 2½ by 4 inches. The photographer, J. R. Daggett of Roseburg, Oregon, is listed at the bottom. Based on a notice in the *Roseburg Ensign* dated August 21, 1869, we know Daggett operated a short-lived studio on Jackson Street during that year. The card stock, print style, and oval vignette all support this narrow dating window.

A number of Daggett's photographs are held by the Douglas County Museum of Natural & Cultural History in Roseburg, Oregon, primarily depicting individuals from Oakland and the surrounding area. This regional pattern reinforces the connection between Daggett's brief studio career and families living in the greater Oakland–Elkton area during the late 1860s.

This image comes from the Vail Dear Steel Box — a small family archive passed down through Thurman Dear's family. While the collection likely belonged to his parents, Allen J. Dear and Fannie A. Vail, the girl in the photograph is almost certainly **Mary E. Vail**, Fannie's older sister, born in 1858 and deceased by 1870. The age of the girl — perhaps around ten or slightly older — is consistent with Mary's age shortly before her death, and the studio's 1869 operation aligns with that timeline.

Though no burial record has been found and the identification remains tentative, the circumstantial evidence — provenance, family relationships, photographer's active dates, and the subject's age — strongly points toward Mary E. Vail. Another image from Daggett in this same collection may be a post-mortem portrait, which could further support this attribution.

If so, this may be the only surviving likeness of Mary E. Vail — a rare and intimate window into a short life, and into an almost-lost chapter of Oregon's early photographic history.